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COUNTRY Poland

SUBJECT Comments on Barbara Wyzwolenie Coal Mine Disaster/
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25X1A 1. "On [redacted] the Polish Communist press gave publicity to a great catastrophe in the coal mine of Barbara Wyzwolenie, in which several dozen miners lost their lives. According to the official communique, a fire burst out in the mine, blocking the exit for the miners. The communique blamed saboteurs for the accident. At the same time editorials demanded increased control of safety measures and modernization of mining equipment. The fact that for the first time the government decided to give publicity to an accident and promised to find the persons responsible and improve conditions in the mine is proof that indignation among miners must be great. Never before have any accidents in mines or factories been given publicity despite the fact that such incidents occur rather often.

25X1X 2. [redacted] it is completely wrong to say that the accident was provoked by sabotage. Despite the strong resistance among miners against the present rulers of Poland, the miners would never commit a sabotage of that kind. Solidarity among miners is considerable; never would they do anything which could endanger so many lives.

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3. [redacted] pels in Nova Ruta who had worked in the mines. [redacted] there are few volunteers for the badly paid and dangerous miners' work. Since the pay for every ton of coal produced has been cut down and norms increased, a miner makes at best 1,000 zloty per month. Only pitmen (sztygarze) can earn up to 2,000 zl. So miners try to leave the mines and look for easier and better-paid work elsewhere. This has caused a shortage of miners and forced the authorities to carry on a tremendous campaign for voluntary miners among the country youth, and also to send young men on compulsory work in mines. For this purpose military conscripts are used. Men who are regarded as politically unreliable, such as sons of kulaks or of the former bourgeoisie, former members of the Polish Army in the West, etc., are sent to such work. They work there for the three years of regular military service without going through any real military training in a regiment. Also all sorts of apprentices in various mechanical schools connected with mining in some way (eg 'electric-mechanical' schools) or just boys from any mechanical and industrial schools in Silesia are sent to work in the mines for some time. These boys usually get a scholarship for their studies and are obliged to work without salary in the mines. This is also the case with soldiers. At best they can get some premium for having overreached their norms. It is clear that the conscripts and the boys from school, who are housed in special barracks and dressed in SP (Siluzna Polaca) uniforms, have had no previous training in the miners' difficult job. There are many accidents with fatal results. Working in Szczecin [redacted], [redacted] on several occasions young women who were widows. [redacted] how and when they lost their husbands they said, my husband was a conscript. But how was he killed? The reply was: 'In the mines!' People know that. The chief fear of a Polish youth is to be sent to the mines - which are regarded as real katownia (forced labor).

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4. "The conscript battalions are called Wojskowe Bataliony Pracy. Some former members of these battalions told me that accidents had occurred mostly through lack of inspection and of proper training of the workers. The orders of the authorities to exploit the mines to the greatest possible extent result in all rules of security being set aside. The props in the mines are of poor quality and collapse frequently. As some mines have seven stories, the passages are propped by so-called pillars (filary). But the pillars contain considerable quantities of coal. Workers have told me that since so much coal is needed for export, orders have been given to remove even the pillars. The engineers refuse to do so. Meetings and conferences take place in Warszawa about every such pillar which has to be removed. The engineers are thereby put into a delicate position. If they refuse, the Communist authorities in Warsaw accuse them of sabotaging the exploitation of the mine; if they agree, they risk an accident. Sometimes houses in Silesian towns get destroyed because of removed mine pillars in the mines under the towns. Orders to economize in the pits result in too few props being used; sometimes passages cave in. The fact that the best props (kopalniaki) are sent abroad and inferior ones used in Polish mines is another reason for catastrophes. Miners used to say: 'What is good goes to the USSR; what is bad is used at home' ('Co dobre idzie zagranice, co liche zostaje u nas'). The ventilation system in the mines is bad. This results in gas accumulations, which was surely the cause of the March accident.
5. "The coal output in Silesia, particularly in the Walbrzych district, is consistently falling off. In 1950 a miner still produced one ton of coal per shift; now [redacted] his output is no more than 600-700 kg. The reasons for this are the senseless plans, inefficient working methods and depreciation

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of the equipment. The management is pretty inefficient and too frequently reorganized; eg, since 1945 the great Wiktoria mine has had no less than 20 managers. Up to 1948 the management was in the hands of Polish specialists; they have now all left under one pretext or another as they could not approve the crazy plans and foresaw that they would end in failure. Since 1948 the mine has been administered by non-professional CP people. In order to fulfill the plans, these managers seek for coal blocks. No side passages are made, no deep boring undertaken. As a result, in 1953 coal had to be transported underground for up to eight km. before it could be hauled up; this has led to excessive wear and tear on the transport equipment. Spare parts are in extremely short supply and in some cases altogether unavailable, especially where the machinery is of German origin. Some new Soviet machines have been brought to the district but break down often as they are unadapted to the Walbrzych mines."

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